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To honor's dictates true,
And never to abandon
Her whom they once pursue.
To win the rose and wear it,
And as it fades away,
To guard its waning beauty,
And cherish in decay.
To look on one with fondness,
Which time nor chance may kill,
Adore with warm devotion
Which naught on earth can chill.
Beside the bed of pain
To catch life's hovering breath,
To close the glazing eyes
And soothe the hour of death.
To wet with tears the turf
Her cold remains above,
And haunt that sacred spot
With never-ceasing love.

—Anon.

A BRAVE GIRL.

A Story of Twenty Years Ago.

It was one of the bleakest of November days, when loose shutter flap, swinging signs creak, and the wind, blowing fitful gusts, plays the mischief generally, that a hasty message came to "Pine Farms," as the quaint, pine-studded old place was called.

An old and tried friend lay dying in the next village, the messenger said, and if Farmer Harris and wife would be there in time for a parting word they must come at once. The dying man had been from early boyhood John Harris' fast friend, and it was with trembling hands he hastened to harness the old gray mare—his wife, meanwhile, with her daughter Bessie's assistance, hurrying together such articles as might be needed for a two days' absence.

In less than an hour everything was ready, and the white-haired couple, seated within the roomy space of the old-time chaise, lingered for a moment's conversation ere they departed.

The distance to Morton, the next village, was not great, nine or ten miles at most, and the intervening road, although unrequented, considered perfectly safe; but on this occasion the farmer and his usually cheery old wife found themselves leaving the house with a strange feeling of reluctance. It might have been the effect of the message they had just received, or perhaps the weird dreariness of the day that so affected their spirits, but certain it was that neither had in all their lives experienced such utter depression, such an overwhelming foreboding of evil to come.

"I don't know why it is," the old lady remarked, as she kissed Bessie for the last time, "but I never hated so to leave home in my life. It seems as if I was leaving you to some danger."

"No fear of that," laughed pretty Bessie Harris. "Tom will be home in half an hour, and besides, we have plenty of firearms in the house should they be needed."

"Well," rejoined her father, "take care of yourself, anyway," and looking back as he drove away, "look up the house directly."

"Whatever could have made them so nervous I wonder," thought Bessie, as she watched the chaise out of sight; "and the idea of locking up now—why it's scarcely more than five o'clock."

Nevertheless the girl proceeded to do as she had been directed, and taking up her sewing, sat down by one of the windows to watch for Tom. Presently he came, a rustic Apollo in beauty, a young Samson in strength, and Bessie could not but smile to herself at the thought of danger, with herculean Tom so near. Yet danger, and that of the direst sort, was even then very near, lurking in the very air and east its hideous shadow athwart the pathway of the sunny-hearted young girl.

The brother and sister sat down to tea, and Bessie laughingly related the strange nervousness her father and mother evinced as they drove away that afternoon; but Tom only looked grave, and when an hour later a knock came at the kitchen door, he strode toward it with an involuntary expansion of muscle fit ready for use. But he almost laughed outright at his superstitious folly when the slight figure of a neighboring farmer's boy presented itself in the doorway. The lad, like the messenger of the afternoon, brought no good tidings. His young master, one of Tom's chums, had just been thrown from his horse, and the frightened mother wanted him to come over, while he, the boy, went for the doctor.

It was a request not to be refused, and forgetting any fears he might have had on Bessie's account, the young man at once put on his hat and coat and prepared to obey the summons.

"Don't open the door to any one, sis," he called back as he left, "and if I return to-night I will tap three times on the door, and probably call out."

"I shall read until twelve," she pleasantly responded, "and if you come after that you will have to tap very loudly," and with a little laugh Tom strode away in the darkness toward his friend's house.

The old Dutch clock in the corner had just struck nine, and Bessie, reading in her comfortable chair, was startled by three distinct raps on the door from which her brother had recently passed out.

"What!" she exclaimed to herself, "Tom back so soon!"

And regardless of the admonitions of the afternoon, and the parting words of her brother, Bessie hastened to throw open the door; but no sooner had she drawn the bolt than a large man—not Tom, how-

ever—walked past her into the room, two others following quickly at his heels, the last one closing and locking the door behind. The first of the three who had thus unceremoniously presented himself, from this fact as well as from gigantic figure and peculiar bearing, appeared to be the leader of the party, and it was he who now addressed the affrighted girl.

"Young woman," said he, "we'll just state our business in two words, and remember, the first show of noise, even to a whimper on your part will fetch this," and he presented an immense horse-pistol close to her cheek. "And now to it," he continued with a grim smile at his companions. "If you happen to have any odd change or watches a-layin' around, we'll just take them along; and first, my beauty," and he looked sharply at her, "we three are a-goin' to have a little fun," and then drawing her down upon his knee he whispered a few words in her ear, then aloud, "so now show us yer room like the pretty lass ye be."

Now, Bessie Harris, unlike her stalwart brother, was slight of build, with the delicately veined forehead and slender hands which betoken a constitution none too strong, and a decided tendency to nervousness, and how it was, as she afterwards said, that she did not drop down dead at the man's feet was more than she could possibly comprehend. But drop, down she did not, and although her heart for the moment stood still, and her limbs seemed paralyzed with horror, the only line of action by which to save herself flashed with telegraphic rapidity across her mind.

It was evident the man expected a scene, and his eyes fairly gleamed in expectation of a determined resistance on her part, but at this, perhaps the most critical moment of all, Bessie made her first move, and to the fellow's great astonishment settled herself more comfortably in his lap, and smiled pleasantly in his face.

"You needn't be in such an everlastin' hurry," she said falling into his own style of lingo. "My brother won't be back for hours yet, and we might as well have something to eat first. There is some splendid old ale in the cellar, and a cold turkey in the cupboard, and I'll get them at once."

"The eatin' and drinkin'," returned the man with a coarse laugh, "is well enough but, my pretty, yer tryin' come some dodge or other, and I tellyer it won't do."

"You're a fool," she retorted, and putting her pretty arms around neck, she whispered: "I am as fond of fun as you are, but they keep me so close I have but few chances in that way," and she added with archness itself: "I don't like your two friends half as well as I do you."

And the girl made no movement to leave his lap, the man believed her, and had he been the most noted beau of the period, with a reigning belle at his feet, he could not have shown himself to have felt more highly flattered.

"You must come with me to the cupboard," she laughingly continued, and, suiting the action to the word, fairly dragged him across the room to where it stood, and from its depths quickly snatched up a bottle of old rye which her father had just purchased for medicinal purposes.

"Smell that, all three of you?" she cried, "and then say I'm trying to come a dodge if you can."

The excitement of the moment had sent a crimson flame over her usually pale cheeks, and a brilliancy into her dark eyes, and Bessie, always pretty, now looked beautiful. The three men, fully awake to the beauty of her appearance, now laughed loudly, and each taking a pull at the bottle, bade her do the same.

Although recoiling at the liquor, to which she was not used, she gave no sign, but drank as requested, hoping, as it burned its way down her throat, that it might strengthen her in the trying part she was about to enact.

The next thing was to get the three villains to eating, and with almost the rapidity of thought she had the table spread, setting cold fowl, ham, bread, cake and preserves in tempting array before them.

The sight of these viands, the girl had rightly calculated, could not be withstood by men leading the uncertain lives of those before her, and true enough, without second invitation, they drew up to the table and "fell too" with the voracity of so many half famished wolves.

"Ain't you goin' to eat with us, gal?" asked the large man, his mouth already crammed with bread and cold fowl.

"Yes," she answered; "as soon as I draw some ale. That rascally old father of mine keeps it locked up; but," she added, "I know where to find the key."

The interesting trio here again laughed long and loud, and Bessie, as she left the room, re-echoed their mirth, in tones that to other than the depraved beings before her would at once have betrayed the terror and despair that was fast straining her nerves beyond their utmost capacity.

The house was built on the old Southern plan, with many rooms on the ground floor, several of which were bedrooms. One of these belonged to Tom, and opened directly into the kitchen, and it had been the girl's idea to pass into this room on the pretext of getting the key or the ale cellar, take down the loaded revolver which always hung beside the bed, shoot one or more of the robbers as they sat at the table, leap from the window, and run for her life.

So far her plan had worked well. The three scoundrels were fairly attracted in another direction, it was but one step to the loaded revolver; but one other to the window, and escape in the impenetrable darkness beyond, but at this moment, the most intense of all, the horrid question came trembling through her mind, could she, so frail, so weak, succeed in evading three such determined desperadoes, and they within a few feet of her very garments?

At all events, she said to herself, she would try, and with an involuntary prayer to the Almighty for help, the brave girl seized the revolver, and aiming it at the large man's head fired her first shot, following it quickly with another at the one sitting next him. The third could only be a random shot, but Bessie sent it with unerring aim, and flying to the window, mounted the sill.

So true had been her aim, for Bessie was a capital markswoman, that two of the villains were already in the arms of death, but the third discharge had only taken effect in the last one's right arm. With the characteristic quickness of his class he at once saw how matters stood, and without a glance at his fallen companions made for the girl, dealing her a heavy blow with the butt of his pistol.

She had nearly reached the window, and although hurt by the force of the blow was not stunned, and with wonderful nerve turned upon her pursuer, shoving him back with her left hand, while with her right she emptied a fourth charge from her revolver into his body.

With a bitter curse the man fell wounded but not senseless to the floor, while Bessie lost no time in making her leap from the window. But as it destined to be thwarted at every point, the poor girl instead of landing safely on the ground a few feet beneath her, found herself suspended midway on the framework of an old vine trainer that in the excitement of the moment she had altogether forgotten. Vainly she endeavored to wrench herself from its grasp; never had a vine trainer proved so imperishable as this; never a petticoat so strong as the one she then wore.

With the blood now streaming over her face into her eyes and mouth from the blow she had just received, Bessie believed her last hour had come and groaned aloud.

"I hear you," bellowed the wounded wretch on the other side of the window, "and I'm crawling along the floor, and as soon as I get to the window I'm going to shoot you."

No cordial could have revived the fainting girl so effectually as the tones of that villain's voice, and once more she made an effort to free herself from the wooden arms of the vine trainer, and with no better success than before.

But too plainly could she hear the man endeavoring to fulfill his threat, the creaking of the boards betraying his gradual approach to the window, and the moments seemed longer than hours as they passed. The revolver had long since dropped from her hand, and a few minutes more would bring her would-be murderer to the support of the window sill. Her doom she said was now sealed; but as the darkest hour is often nearest dawn, so Bessie's deliverance at this instant presented itself. She had forgotten it, but her workcase, or housewife, as it was called in those days was in her pocket. It contained besides needles and thread a pair of small but extremely sharp scissors, and to these she was to owe her rescue.

It was but the work of a moment to get them out and cut herself loose from the tenacious framework, and a few seconds later Bessie found herself pounced with a heavy thud upon the frozen ground beneath her.

The man inside heard her fall, and renewed his already desperate efforts to gain the window, his face just appearing above the sill as Bessie regained the possession of the revolver, for which she had been quietly searching on hands and knees.

The darkness of the night prevented his seeing her at a first glance, but with the bright light shining from the kitchen beyond, his head was plainly discernible, and with the last remnant of her fast departing strength she again raised the revolver and fired, then, with what speed she could muster, struck out for the road; and here it was, but a few rods beyond the garden gate, that Tom found her afterward, in a senseless condition.

Of the three men, but one survived the contest of that fearful night, he being the one, as the reader will surmise, who persisted in following the fleeing girl to the very last limit of his power. But his after career was of but short duration, death claiming him before he could be brought to trial. The large man, who appeared to have died without a struggle, was found to have been the leader of a gang of marauders that were fast becoming the terror of that part of the country, and his sudden taking off proved a blessing to the community. The rest of the band, disheartened at his luckless end, left the country, and were seen no more.

For three long months Bessie hovered between life and death, and when she finally recovered somewhat of her former strength, it was but a semblance of her old time joyousness of spirits, and a streak of gray mingled with the nut-brown hair so much admired by all who knew her.

Farmer Harris and his wife ever remember the strange foreboding of that dark November afternoon, and Bessie was never again left alone in the little wilderness of "Pine Barrens."

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